



STATE REPRESENTATIVE ANDREW FLEISCHMANN

18TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT, WEST HARTFORD



LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 3101
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

December, 2005

Dear Neighbor,

I am glad to report that the 2005 legislative session was both productive and successful.

As House Chairman of the Education Committee, I was afforded the opportunity to work on a number of major initiatives that will significantly increase the state's investments in our children.

As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I was proud to support a budget that:

- Increased funding for primary and secondary education by tens of millions of dollars;
- Strengthened state support for key healthcare initiatives; and
- Rejected increases in nuisance and sin taxes that Governor Rell had proposed.

In addition to passing a sensible budget, the legislature tackled a number of other key issues. We passed new, landmark legislation on early childhood education – so that all of Connecticut's children arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready-to-learn. We rebuilt the state's ethics commission, creating a new body that will be far more effective than its predecessor. And we enacted a number of statutes protecting the environment, addressing energy concerns, and helping seniors.

The newsletter that follows summarizes these new statutes. Please feel free to contact my office by phone or e-mail if you would like more information on these or other matters.

Thank you for taking the time to read about these issues. Best wishes for a happy, healthy winter and spring.

Sincerely,

Andrew Fleischmann
State Representative

SCHOOL READINESS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This year, I was proud to co-author legislation establishing a whole new approach to early childhood education in Connecticut.

This new law established an Early Childhood Education Cabinet, a body that includes all the key players in this area – the Commissioner of Education, the Commissioner of Children and Families, the Commissioner of Social Services, the House and Senate Chairs of the Education and Human Services Committees, and local officials involved with providing childcare and education. Working together, these stakeholders are developing a comprehensive, statewide plan to increase access to school readiness programs.

In addition, the new law:

- Sets up clear standards for staff qualifications;
- Ensures that all towns receiving school readiness grants establish a local school readiness council;
- Requires the cabinet to conduct a statewide, longitudinal evaluation of school readiness programs;
- Promotes comprehensiveness and consistent quality among programs.

Taken together, the law's new requirements will help ensure that every dollar spent on early childhood education is well invested. And, more importantly, we will move toward a system in which every single child in Connecticut arrives in kindergarten ready to learn.

(PA 05-245)



Education

Promoting Improvements in School Nutrition

This past spring the General Assembly passed the strongest school nutrition bill in the nation; I was proud to lead the fight for its passage through the House. Though the Governor decided – unwisely, in my opinion – to veto this measure, I am nonetheless proud of the bill and the effect it has had nationwide.

An Act Concerning School Nutrition would have eliminated both junk food and sugary sodas from Connecticut's public schools. Permissible beverages would have been water, milk, 100% fruit or vegetable juice, or beverages containing water and juice with no added sweeteners. At the high school level, schools also would also have been permitted – thirty minutes after the end of the last lunch period – to sell electrolyte replacement beverages (e.g. Gatorade) and diet sodas. In lieu of vending machine junk food, schools would have been permitted to sell healthful snacks (from a list prepared by the State Department of Education). The measure also would have established local wellness committees, which would have made recommendations to boards of education regarding school nutrition and promotion of physical activity and exercise. *(PA 05-117)*

A few short months after passage of this legislation, the American Beverage Association (ABA) announced that it was adopting a voluntary ban on sales of sodas and other sugary soft drinks in elementary schools across the nation. Observers agree that the ABA's decision was largely a reaction to the preparedness of states like ours to outlaw such sales.

Myriad studies have shown that a child's physical well-being affects his or her ability to learn. An Act Concerning School Nutrition would have moved Connecticut closer to the ancient ideal of *mens sana in corpore sano* – a healthy mind in a healthy body. While I am deeply disappointed by the Governor's veto of the bill, I will continue to work to promote that ideal.



Energy

Promoting Energy Conservation and Helping Families Afford Home Heating

Over the past few months, prices for key energy commodities like home heating oil and natural gas have soared. For Connecticut residents, the increased costs for keeping our homes warm are worrisome for many – and unaffordable for numerous families.

For this reason, I strongly supported legislation – enacted during the General Assembly's recent special session – to help both low-income and middle-class families deal with rising energy costs.

The new law establishes a Sales Tax Holiday for home weatherization products and energy efficient home heating equipment. This new tax holiday will reduce costs for consumers and promote energy conservation. From now through April 1st of next year, you will pay no sales tax on purchases of the following items in Connecticut:

- Gas furnaces
- Energy efficient water heaters
- Energy efficient oil furnaces (85% efficiency minimum)
- Insulation
- Programmable thermostats
- Weather stripping and caulking

The legislation also will fund the increased caseload we anticipate in the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP), which helps low-income families cover heating bills.

The assembly also provided a new, \$300 basic benefit for families that do not qualify for CEAP and earn up to 60% of the state's median income level. This benefit is reinforced by an additional \$200 benefit for households that use deliverable fuels (e.g. home heating oil).

Finally, the new law creates a new HEARTH program (Home Energy Assistance Reimbursement for Tune-ups of Heating equipment). This benefit of up to \$50 per household is available to CEAP recipients who have their heating equipment tuned up for the winter. Such annual tune-ups increase home safety and reduce fuel consumption. In short, this new law will help families to pay their heating bills and increase energy conservation; I am proud to have supported this legislation. *(SB 2100, 2005 Special Session)*



Environment

Banning Pesticides at Day Care Facilities and Elementary Schools

As Chair of the Education Committee, I was proud to support a new law to phase out the use of pesticides on elementary school grounds, and ban their use at public and private preschools and daycare centers. (The new law includes a special exception to the ban for public health emergencies, such as an outbreak of West Nile Virus.) Children's developing organs and nervous systems are especially vulnerable to the cumulative effects of exposure to insecticides and herbicides. A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (July 27, 2005) showed that "pesticide drift" associated with the use of pesticides on school grounds causes an array of health problems for children. Thankfully, my colleagues chose to join me in supporting this new law in advance of the article's publication. *(PA 05-252)*



A NEW CLEAN CAR INCENTIVE PROGRAM FOR CONNECTICUT

This new law, which I strongly supported, requires the creation of a plan to encourage Connecticut residents to invest in vehicles that produce lower greenhouse gas emissions. Under the legislation, leaders of state government will convene a working group that will submit a plan no later than January of the coming year to reduce sales taxes on clean cars, such as new, hybrid cars that use electric as well as gasoline power. Cars, trucks and SUV's are the greatest source of greenhouse gas pollution in our state, creating more than 40% of our total greenhouse gas emissions. This new law will provide significant health and economic benefits to Connecticut families. It will help to slow the increase in asthma and other pulmonary diseases, and strengthen sales of vehicles that use less fuel and create fewer damaging emissions. *(Special Act 05-6)*

Seniors


Information for Seniors Regarding Medicare Part D and Other Key Programs

- ⇒ During the autumn special session, the General Assembly passed legislation to protect ConnPACE – the state's subsidized prescription drug program – from problems caused by Medicare Part D. The new law ensures that low-income seniors who qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid will continue to be able to get their prescriptions filled without substantial new co-pays. It also gives the Department of Social Services the ability to help low-income seniors select the most appropriate prescription drug programs. *(HB 7702)*
- ⇒ ConnPACE participants will be able to enroll in the federal Medicaid Part D program. *(PA 05-280)*
- ⇒ *Need help understanding Medicare Part D? Contact the CHOICES program for assistance at 1-800-994-9422.*
- ⇒ The Department on Aging will become a separate agency in 2007. *(PA 05-280)*
- ⇒ The Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders raised the asset limits from \$19,020 for singles to \$28,530 and from \$28,530 to \$38,040 for married couples. *(PA 05-280)*



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STATE REPRESENTATIVE ANDREW FLEISCHMANN
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 3101
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106
PHONE: 240-0420 OR E-MAIL: ANDREW.FLEISCHMANN@CGA.CT.GOV



Ethics Reform



CREATING A NEW OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS AND CITIZEN’S ETHICS ADVISORY BOARD

Over the past few years, scandals in state government - and the failure of the State Ethics Commission to address them appropriately - have shown the need for reform of the state’s ethics enforcement process. To more effectively address and enforce ethics rules, the General Assembly voted to start fresh and create a new Office of State Ethics (OSE) and nine-member Citizen’s Ethics Advisory Board; these two entities replace the former State Ethics Commission. The structure of the OSE divides the office into legal and enforcement divisions. The OSE will have a new Executive Director, an ethics enforcement officer and a general counsel. The office will administer and enforce the state’s Code of Ethics for Public Officials and Code of Ethics for Lobbyists; it will also educate officials and the general public about Connecticut’s ethics laws. The enforcement division will investigate complaints filed and initiated by the Citizen’s Advisory Board. All probable cause hearings and determinations will be brought before a judge trial referee, who will determine whether sufficient grounds exist to move a case forward. Finally, the General Assembly has budgeted sufficient funds for the new office to begin hiring staff. *(PA 05-183)*